



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION 10**

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OFFICE OF  
ECOSYSTEMS,  
TRIBAL AND PUBLIC  
AFFAIRS

May 12, 2014

Kris Stein, Manager  
Hells Canyon National Recreation Area  
Wallowa-Whitman National Forest  
201 East 2<sup>nd</sup> Street  
P.O. Box 905  
Joseph, Oregon 97846

Re: Comments on the draft EIS for the Lower Imnaha Rangeland Analysis (EPA Region 10 Project Number: 11-4123-AFS)

Dear Ms. Stein:

In accordance with our responsibilities under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has reviewed the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the **Lower Imnaha Rangeland Analysis** on Hells Canyon National Recreation Area of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in Wallowa County, Oregon.

The DEIS analyzed potential environmental impacts of continuing livestock grazing on a 44,000-acre project area (or Lower Imnaha Rangeland Analysis area) that includes Lone Pine, Cow Creek, Rhodes Creek, and Toomey allotments for the next 10 years. Activities would include fixing and removing fences, developing and improving water facilities, and rangeland monitoring. If implemented as proposed, the project would move resources in the analysis area to desired future conditions and allow the District to meet Forest Service policies and public laws authorizing grazing leases on public lands.

Analysis of impacts from the project considered five alternative actions (A-E), including a No Action. The most important differences between alternatives relate to grazing strategies for the allotments, which would include changes in timing, location, grazing intensity, and pasture rotation. Under the Proposed Action (Alternative C), season and timing of use would be adjusted to address resource concerns; livestock distribution would be improved through water developments; and conflicts between grazing and recreationists would be minimized. The DEIS does not identify a preferred alternative.

Based on our review, we are issuing a rating of LO (Lack of Objection) to the Draft EIS. An explanation of this rating is attached. The EPA supports the overall purpose of the proposed action to allocate forage for livestock grazing while improving range conditions, especially in riparian areas, and a grazing strategy that combines early season, rest-rotation grazing systems with fences and water developments to preserve and protect resources. We also note with appreciation that the DEIS addresses many of the issues we raised during the project scoping period in September 2011, including analysis of cumulative impacts and climate change effects. Thus, we commend the Forest Service staff for working with a variety of stakeholders and considering public comments in the NEPA analysis for the project.

Overall, we believe the DEIS document includes a Good description of resources in the analysis area, anticipated impacts and mitigation measures to offset the impacts. We note the valuable inclusion of monitoring programs designed to meet resource management objectives by monitoring compliance and effectiveness.

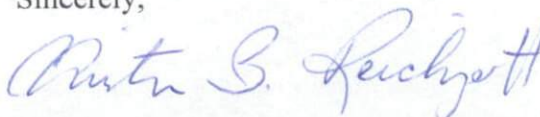
We would encourage additional early actions to address streams that are currently functioning at risk, such as the Imnaha River (p. 341). Actions to increase shade and improve hydrologic functioning of streams (addressing fine sediment loads, temperature, width to depth ratio, and bank stability) would be beneficial. Similar actions would also benefit many riparian areas in the Toomey allotment where most hydrologic impacts are found. Further protection of riparian areas may be warranted, especially around creeks that are not expected to meet desired conditions for many years e.g. Lightning Creek (p. 363), and other areas where impacts may affect high quality habitat(s) and other sensitive resources, such as the *Spalding's catchfly* and its habitat. Of all the proposed action alternatives, therefore, the EPA would support selection of Alternative D, which, compared to the other alternatives, would reduce grazing pressure on the allotments through use of fewer head-months, timing of grazing, rest rotations, and forage utilization to conserve resources and preserve environmental conditions (reduced soil disturbance, minimal impacts to *Spalding's catchfly*, and faster recovery of rangeland resource conditions).

Since the Imnaha and Snake Rivers and Lightning Creek were previously listed on the Oregon State's 303(d) list for exceedences of stream temperature standards, we would encourage the Forest Service to coordinate with Oregon Department of Environmental Quality as the proposed project is implemented to ensure compliance with Water Quality Restoration Plans that will function as the Forest Services' share of the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) implementation in the decision area and vicinity. Please also note that anti-degradation provisions of the Clean Water Act apply to those water bodies where water quality standards are met.

We note that the fish-bearing creeks in the analysis area host threatened and endangered species such as the Snake River Steelhead (p. 372). We recommend continued coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service and/or the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife as appropriate, to reduce risks to species and protect biota and habitat during implementation of the proposed livestock grazing. The final EIS should include any additional relevant information developed as a result of coordination with these agencies.

If you have questions about our comments, please contact me at (206) 553-1601 or by electronic mail at [reichgott.christine@epa.gov](mailto:reichgott.christine@epa.gov), or you may contact Theogene Mbabaliye of my staff at (206) 553-6322 or by electronic mail at [mbabaliye.theogene@epa.gov](mailto:mbabaliye.theogene@epa.gov).

Sincerely,



Christine B. Reichgott, Manager  
Environmental Review and Sediment Management Unit

Enclosures

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Rating System for  
Draft Environmental Impact Statements  
Definitions and Follow-Up Action\***

**Environmental Impact of the Action**

**LO – Lack of Objections**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The review may have disclosed opportunities for application of mitigation measures that could be accomplished with no more than minor changes to the proposal.

**EC – Environmental Concerns**

EPA review has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment. Corrective measures may require changes to the preferred alternative or application of mitigation measures that can reduce these impacts.

**EO – Environmental Objections**

EPA review has identified significant environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to provide adequate protection for the environment. Corrective measures may require substantial changes to the preferred alternative or consideration of some other project alternative (including the no-action alternative or a new alternative). EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

**EU – Environmentally Unsatisfactory**

EPA review has identified adverse environmental impacts that are of sufficient magnitude that they are unsatisfactory from the standpoint of public health or welfare or environmental quality. EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts. If the potential unsatisfactory impacts are not corrected at the final EIS stage, this proposal will be recommended for referral to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

**Adequacy of the Impact Statement**

**Category 1 – Adequate**

EPA believes the draft EIS adequately sets forth the environmental impact(s) of the preferred alternative and those of the alternatives reasonably available to the project or action. No further analysis of data collection is necessary, but the reviewer may suggest the addition of clarifying language or information.

**Category 2 – Insufficient Information**

The draft EIS does not contain sufficient information for EPA to fully assess environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment, or the EPA reviewer has identified new reasonably available alternatives that are within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which could reduce the environmental impacts of the action. The identified additional information, data, analyses or discussion should be included in the final EIS.

**Category 3 – Inadequate**

EPA does not believe that the draft EIS adequately assesses potentially significant environmental impacts of the action, or the EPA reviewer has identified new, reasonably available alternatives that are outside of the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which should be analyzed in order to reduce the potentially significant environmental impacts. EPA believes that the identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussions are of such a magnitude that they should have full public review at a draft stage. EPA does not believe that the draft EIS is adequate for the purposes of the National Environmental Policy Act and or Section 309 review, and thus should be formally revised and made available for public comment in a supplemental or revised draft EIS. On the basis of the potential significant impacts involved, this proposal could be a candidate for referral to the CEQ.

\* From EPA Manual 1640 Policy and Procedures for the Review of Federal Actions Impacting the Environment. February, 1987.